

# THE HISTORY PAGE

## Heber City and its country newspaper, the Wasatch Wave

► The following is an abridgement of an article that appeared in the *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Volume 57, No. 3, 1989. It is reprinted here with permission of the Utah State Historical Society. At the time of writing, Jessie L. Embry was oral history program director at the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University.

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**A**n important part of the community life in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th century was the local newspaper.

One editor described the weekly as "the sweet intimate story of life" because it recorded marriages, births and deaths. He added, "[If] by chance [you] pick up the little country newspaper ... don't throw down the contemptible little rag with the verdict that there is nothing in it. ... If you could ... read the little paper as it is written, you would find all of God's beautiful, sorrowing, struggling, aspiring world in it, and what you saw would make you touch the little paper with reverent hands."

The Heber Herald [was] published by 10-year-old Abram Hatch Jr. from 1890 to 1893. It was discontinued not because of the type of news it carried but because the youthful editor complained of too many chores and too much homework. ...

The Herald was the "competition" for those three years to the Wasatch Wave, the weekly newspaper that is still published in the county and which started the same year, 1889, that Heber

City was incorporated. ...

In the centennial year [1989] of the incorporation of Heber City and of the founding of the Wave, it is fitting to examine the role that the Wave has played in Heber, which was similar to the relationship between other communities and country newspapers in Utah and the United States. ...

Although probably overstating, one professor of journalism in the early 1900s even went so far as to say, "Without its newspaper the small-town American community would be like a school without a teacher or a church without a pastor."

The newspaper, like a teacher or a preacher, played an important role in promoting development and what the community's founding fathers would call progress. ...

Around the turn of the century when the Wave was just getting its start, a whole set of literature about country journalism was also appearing. These books told the value of local newspapers, how to start and publish a paper, and perhaps more important to the local editor, how to write a good editorial. ...

The Wasatch Wave, like other weekly newspapers in Utah, accepted the role of conscience for the town as well as the reporter of local news. ...

In the first edition, published on March 23, 1889, William Buys, Wasatch County and Heber City attorney, as well as "notary public, city surveyor, and civil engineer," penned,

*In rafting the Wasatch Wave we realize it is but a tiny ripple upon the great ocean of journalism, but we sincerely hope and trust that*



Heber City, Utah, before the advent of paved roads.

*it may grow and gather strength as it proceeds on its perilous journey. We are also aware that there are breakers in its course against which it may run and be dashed to pieces and the great commotion caused by the shock, be scarcely perceptible upon the broad expanse of the vast literary sea.*

That first edition included advertisements (with Buys listing his various businesses right under the masthead); a "History of Wasatch County" by John Crook; "Local Waves"; Park City news; and an article on

"How a Dog Should

Editorials were not one page; many of about local events and comments by Buys. For example, one article described to build a new flour mill in Heber City, and he expressed his views on the topic.

From 1889 to 1920 Buys, his nephew Charles Barzee, C. O. Glavin, A. Murdock, the Western Estate and Development Company, and Charles W. Bennett published the

Newcomers challenged editorial policies and grew in length — e



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1895 when Glanville and Murdock leased the paper it sold for \$1.50 a year. ...

As the town booster, nearly all of the Wave's editorials described ways to improve Heber City. Progress was defined as any type of forward-looking projects that would improve life in Heber and that would bring attention to the community.

Especially valuable, according to the Wave, were civic improvements. ...

Weekly newspapers as well as city governments promoted public utilities. As E. A. Little explained in The Country Publisher in 1917, for any movement "which promises to benefit the community," a "few well planned articles will give an impetus. ... Certainly countless community projects have been initiated and carried out through the efforts of the country weekly editor."

William Buys' obituary shows that he fit this mold:

*Whenever he went into a subject he went into it with all his might. No detail was too small to receive his careful consideration. He was one of the leaders in procuring the telephone, the railroad, the waterworks, the electric lights, in fact he was a leader advocate and indefatigable worker for every public improvement we have made since he took up his abode with us over 30 years ago.*

Providing waterworks to Heber is an example of how the

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l Be Fed." not limited to the articles also included. For example, plans for a mill in expressed opinion. ... William George Heber, Joseph Hatch Real Estate Commission. Broad-newspaper. aged some and the paper especially car-

rying more national news and syndicated stories — but the local reporting remained the same.

The masthead of the first paper announced that it would sell for \$2.50 a year, \$1.25 for six months, and 75 cents for three months. (Hatch's Herald competed by only charging "25 cents for three months, 50 cents for six months, and so on!") In



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newspaper's encouragement provided public services to Heber. An editorial in the Wave just a month after it started, entitled "What We Need," reported if the springs just above town were "put in pipes to Main Street [they] would convey a head of 100 feet" which would be "sufficient force to throw the water over the tallest buildings."

Rather than building artesian wells, the paper argued that for the cost of a few wells the town could lay pipes and bring water to homes.

Each year editorials continued to appeal for waterworks. When Midway constructed its waterworks in 1896 the Wave argued that Heber needed them just as much. A resident pointed out that more people, animals and plants had made the water impure and unhealthy. Other arguments were that some wells were "no better than sewers."

Even the Heber Herald carried comments about the need for waterworks. Noting that the city drinking water came from the mountains in the irrigation streams, Hatch wrote, "Tuesday we saw a dead cow being drug through the streams and ditches. It may be called alright. We don't know!"

The decision finally to build waterworks in Heber was a joint effort between the Wave, local citizens, the LDS Church and the town council.

An 1899 editorial stated, "We have a plan which we think the best, but whether the majority of the people will agree with us, of course, we do not know. We think the most feasible is that of issuing bonds. As a general proposition we do not favor bonding or indebtedness of any kind, but in this instance we think it better than any other plan."

In 1902 and 1904 the LDS Church's high council talked about the need for water in town and approved passing a bond to cover the cost. In 1904 a waterworks committee canvassed the town, taking \$50 subscriptions for water, and a mass meeting was held on bonding issues. An election was scheduled for July 24, 1904, and the Wave ran editorials asking citizens to vote for the bond "and do your part toward making Heber a city second to none of its size in the nation." The bond passed 164 to 32.

One of the newspaper's favorite topics was the railroad, first the need and then the service provided by the Rio

## **"It isn't Heber City but it should be. Heber has enough ... The town corporation has outlived should be laid on the shelf with other worn**

Grande Western.

Shortly after Heber was incorporated and after the Wave's first issue, the Park Record reported plans to build a railroad up Parley's Canyon to Park City. The Wave editorialized, "Let it be immediately completed to Heber," arguing that since Heber was on the Indian reservation border it would be an excellent shipping stop for supplies.

In true booster style it added, "We have almost within the limits of the town, the finest sandstone quarries in the west and we believe the finest in the United States. ... Had we a railroad here, this sandstone could undoubtedly become an article of considerable value."

Editorials in October [1889] pointed out that the railroad through Heber would also help open mines, provide coal to Park City and Wasatch County, open up the Uinta Basin, shorten the route to central Colorado, turn the valley into a summer resort and develop Heber as a manufacturing center.

Although the "Local Waves" section announced that a survey had been finished to Heber, the railroad was not completed at that time, much to the disappointment of the residents and the newspaper.

Talk of a railroad through Heber City resumed in 1896 when a Rio Grande Western employee came to Heber and talked to Abram Hatch and other businessmen about securing a right of way through the valley. Talks continued in 1899 when 20 Heber citizens met with railroad officials. They asked residents to furnish the depot ground and to raise \$2,500 to purchase the right of way. When the money was \$700 short in August, the newspaper encouraged residents to "get behind and help" since their support was expected. By September the railroad was completed.

The Wave continued to be the railroad watchdog for the community. For example, in 1903 when the Sunday run was cut, the Wave editorialized,

*When the railroad was built into*

*the valley by the Rio Grande Western the people here contributed liberally towards purchasing the right of way ... and the company promised, or at least led the people here to believe that they would get a reasonable respectable service. For a time the company lived up to its implied agreement and we had an excellent railroad service with two trains a day, then one train was taken off. ... This the people submitted to without a murmur. Now the Sunday train is taken off and we get no mail from Saturday morning until Monday.*

The article pointed out the next move might be semiweekly or even weekly trains and suggested, since the service was so infrequent and so unreliable because of mud slides during the spring and snow slides during the winter in Provo Canyon, the mail might as well come on the stage from Park City since sometimes it got in before the train.

In February 1904 a 75-foot snow slide nine miles below Bridal Veil Falls [in Provo Canyon] uprooted trees 100 feet high and stopped train service indefinitely. The Wave asked why one train could not go to the slide, allow the passengers to hike over the snow drift, and then catch a train on the other side.

Despite these inconveniences, according to the Wave, Heber City appreciated the railroad because it brought increased prosperity and a market for goods. In 1915 the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad could boast that Heber shipped 360 cars of sheep, 280 cars of hay, 40 cars of cattle and 60 cars of sugar beets annually.

Although Heber City was incorporated as a town in 1889, the Wave continually encouraged the residents to vote to make it a third class city. In 1897 an editorial complained, "It isn't Heber City but it should be. Heber has been a town long enough ... The town corporation has outlived its usefulness and should be laid on the shelf with other worn-out machinery." Three



## s been a town long its usefulness and out machinery."

Years later another editorial said,

*The Wave has several times referred to the subject of changing the town of Heber to a city, but no one seems inclined to take hold of the matter and make a move in that direction. It is, of course, nobody's business in particular but everybody's business in general, and generally in such cases no one comes to take the initiative. All, or nearly all, admit that a city organization would be much better than a town and that the change ought to be made but that does not do it.*

Each article carefully spelled out the need for a petition by 100 residents and an election and also explained that a city had greater control over how it spent its money than a town, had better premises for providing police and sanitary facilities, and would not cost more than being a town.

In 1901 an editorial quoted a Salt Lake Tribune article, supposedly by Heber resident J. W. Aird: "Heber City people who have been in the city lately are jubilant ... that the initial steps" had been taken to make the town a city. They believe that it has been in swaddling clothing entirely too long."

The Wave added, "There is no reason why Heber should not be one of the best country cities in the state and double in population within the next 10 years." Residents gathered petitions and voted in favor of cityhood in November 1901. ...

But public utilities such as water-works, new businesses such as the railroad, and promotions such as cityhood were not the only improvements necessary to make Heber the best town of its size in the nation. The Wave had other requirements.

On the first Statehood Day the paper reported that "the town had the appearance of the 4th of July" with music, speeches and the firing of guns. The paper was especially proud that in addition to speeches by stake president Abram Hatch on "The Admission of

Utah" and two talks on the role of women in the new state, music was provided by the Heber Brass Band, the Olson Orchestra and local talented individuals.

Two years later when the young men left to fight in the Spanish-American War, a brass band played to send them off. Because of the war, the Wave noted, "celebrations this year will have a deeper and more profound nature and band music will add to the spirit." ...

Another essential ingredient for a town was a baseball team. In 1895 the newspaper asked, "What is the matter with the Heber base ballists? A few years ago we had a team here that was a credit to Wasatch County and the pride of the residents of Heber. These same men ... with practice would soon make as strong a team as ever, and Heber would again be recognized throughout the territory as a baseball town not to be sneered at." ...

Equally important was a dramatic club. In 1889 the Heber Dramatic Association performed *The Social Glass*, and the Wave reported the production was "done better than last winter" and added that the editors "hoped to see more of the Heber Association soon." ...

Most of all the Wasatch Wave, like many other small country papers, was proud of the community it served and the people it represented. ... The bottom line in every effort was progress. Besides promoting the growth of the community and working to make Heber a better place to live, the newspaper praised Heber's growth, virtues and increased prosperity. ...

Especially during the late 19th and early 20th century, Heber City was a typical Utah and American town, and its newspaper reflected its growth. ...

[Its] growth was brought about partially because of the encouragement of the Wave, and the newspaper continues to survive because of the support of the local residents in Wasatch County.

At the time of incorporation and for the next 30 years Heber City closely mirrored the experiences of other Utah and American communities.

Even more so, Heber City and the Wasatch Wave exemplify that the country town and the country newspaper still exist.

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